

FRANCIS GARY POWERS can be respected but not revered. He will not go down in U. S. history as a Nathan Hale in a jet airplane. The official report on his conduct shows nothing of the Hale spirit of "I regret that I have but one life to give for my country." Powers took the best care that he could of his own skin, after his U-2 craft was batted down from the unfriendly skies over Russia.

But much more important is the official verdict on Powers. It is that he served this country faithfully on his ill-fated flight over Russia. Apparently that judgment was based on a meticulous investigation. After the Russians allowed Powers to return to the United States, his superiors arranged for a special board of inquiry. The board was headed by E. Barrett Prettyman, a judge of the U. S. court of appeals. After hearing the evidence, the Senate armed service committee also, in effect, has absolved Powers.

The board's findings show that Powers lived up to the terms of his well-paid employment and "his obligation as an American." The investigation covered both the circumstances of why Powers was unable to destroy his highly secret espionage equipment and his conduct while on trial for his life in a Soviet courtroom.

Some Americans have sternly contended that Powers should have killed himself, instead of being taken alive. But it was Powers's life, not theirs. And his superiors did not expect him to resort to suicide, if he were captured. This much has been made clear—although other questions posed by the episode remain unanswered.

Powers was risking his life every time he flew his U-2 plane over Soviet territory. Obviously, he is a brave man. The U-2 operation provided vital information on Soviet military capabilities. And Powers made a major contribution to the success of that cold war espionage project. Who can properly criticize him for not also choosing to